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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001271

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SUBJECT: UZBEKS TOUT FOREIGN "EXPERT" COMMENTS ON
PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

REF: 06 TASHKENT 2205

Classified By: CDA Brad Hanson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) In early June, the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a publication claiming to highlight positive international reactions to the adoption of the two new Uzbek Constitutional Laws. The booklet, titled "Comments and Assessments of Foreign Political and Expert Circles of the Constitutional Law" seeks to wrap recent changes to Uzbekistan's constitution (reftel) in the language of democratic political theory, claiming the new law will strengthen political parties and build civil society. The booklet claims the provisions reflect the constitutions of established European democracies, and that they have attracted widespread interest and approval.

¶2. (C) Comment: Post understands that the genesis of this booklet was an instruction to Uzbek Embassies worldwide to hold meetings on the constitutional changes and to report positive comments back to Tashkent. We cannot verify that the meeting participants were accurately quoted and in fact would not be at all surprised to learn that their comments were judiciously edited or taken out of context for the purposes of Uzbek propaganda. End comment.

¶3. (SBU) In addition to justifying the Constitutional changes on the basis of political theory, the booklet also contains 60 pages of commentary on the new laws, purportedly from foreign "experts." The commentary is uniformly optimistic; repeatedly stressing that a more limited form of democracy is appropriate for Uzbekistan's unique socioeconomic and cultural context. Much of the commentary is from Russian experts, although a wide range of other nationalities, including Americans, are represented.

¶4. (SBU) Notable quotations:

-- Frederick Starr, Director, Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, John Hopkins University (USA)

"The initiatives of the President of Uzbekistan open up broad prospects for further liberalization of socio-political life and strengthening of political parties. Conceptual aspects of constitutional and political reforms in Uzbekistan should not be viewed without taking into account contemporary political modernization of non-western societies. This is particularly important with regards to the fact that the young democracies of Central Asia for over the past decade have been searching for their own paths of socio-economic and political development. This process is directed at preserving cultural distinction, self-identification and political culture which was formed in a concrete historical context."

-- Prof. Jean Blankoff, Free Brussels University, member of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Belgium

"....In order to build a democratic society one should take into account history and traditions, national and local specifics and avoid blindly copying western nations. It took 200 years for the world community to create a model of relative democracy but it is losing its efficiency and it needs to be updated. Therefore Uzbekistan's initiative will be a real contribution to the democratic development of the world."

-- Joseph Goldblatt, Vice President, Geneva International Institute for Peace Studies

"....In a democratic society the public can sometimes ask government 'too many questions'. Therefore, in my opinion, what you are discussing, i.e. amending certain provisions of the Constitution is very important for the future of the country."

-- Prof. Albin Glovatsky, Lodz University (Poland)

"....It needs to be noted that the emergence of oppositional factions amongst the political factions... confirms that the leadership of the country is deeply interested in the democratization of the state and society."

¶5. (C) Comment: Professor Glovatsky is half-correct: the Government of Uzbekistan is deeply interested in appearing deeply interested in democratization. The booklet reads like a textbook on democracy-building and the creation of civil society, suggesting yet again that the government is

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increasingly concerned with the rhetoric of democratic politics. Unfortunately, it has yet to acquire the underlying convictions. Although useful structural reforms in the abstract, absent a true commitment to parliamentary democracy and the rule of law they are as empty as the praise contained in MFA's booklet.

HANSON